

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, Plaintiff, v. IDAHLIE VAZQUEZ Defendant.	CIVIL NO. 20-1509 False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729, <u>et seq.</u>
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COMPLAINT

TO THE HONORABLE COURT:

COMES NOW the United States of America, by and through the undersigned attorneys,
and very respectfully alleges and prays:

1. Jurisdiction of this action is conferred on this Court by 28 U.S.C. § 1345.
2. Defendant in this case, Idahlie Vazquez (“hereinafter Defendant”), was a caregiver, legal custodian, and authorized signatory for the Veterans Affairs (“VA”) benefits of Lucy De Lucca, a recipient of VA pension benefits. Defendant is currently a resident of San Juan, Puerto Rico.
3. VA pension benefits beneficiary Lucy De Lucca passed away in March 17, 2006.
4. After Lucy De Lucca passed away, Defendant, as the deceased’s caregiver, legal custodian, and VA pension benefits signatory failed to notify the VA of the death of Lucy De Lucca. Instead of notifying VA and returning the VA pension benefits payments received after Lucy De Lucca’s death, Defendant continued to endorse and cash the VA pension benefits checks issued to Lucy De Lucca from the time she passed away until December of 2014.

5. VA Office of the Inspector General Special Agents (“VA OIG”) interviewed Defendant to determine the reason(s) why the checks were been deposited and cashed out. Defendant acknowledged she continued to receive and negotiated Lucy De Lucca’s checks after she passed away and kept the funds for her own use. Vazquez also indicated that she never had applied for VA benefits for herself, and that she never reported Lucy De Lucca’s death to the VA.

6. The total amount of VA pension benefits payments of Lucy De Lucca that Defendant illegally cashed amounts to the sum of \$111,402.00. The United States contends that the presentation of the checks for payment, and the subsequent cashing of the checks constitute the submission of false claims under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729 et seq.

CLAIM FOR RELIEF

7. The United States refers to and incorporates by reference, the allegations contained in Paragraphs 1 through 6 of this complaint as though fully set forth herein.

8. This is a claim for damages and civil monetary penalties under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3729(a)(1).

9. As part of the scheme to defraud and described in the above referenced Paragraphs, Defendant’s presentation and subsequent cashing of the VA pension benefits checks caused false claims to be submitted to the VA for benefits entitlement that Defendant was not eligible for under applicable VA benefits programs.

10. Under the FCA, a “claim” includes the presentation of checks and/or requests for money presented to agents of the United States or to a contractor, grantee, or other recipient, if the money is to be used on the government’s behalf or to advance a government interest, as long as the United States provided any portion of the money requested. Furthermore, the presentation and

subsequent cashing of checks related to government benefit programs by ineligible individuals or entities when these benefits are no longer legally available to authorized beneficiaries are considered the presentation of false claims under the FCA. As such, the United States is entitled to treble damages under the FCA for the loss caused to the government.

11. Moreover, under the FCA each of these false claims constitute, via the presentation and cashing of the benefits' checks, the submission of false claims to the government for which damages and civil monetary penalties must be assigned in an amount ranging between \$5,500.00 up to \$11,000.00 each.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, the United States of America respectfully requests that judgment be entered in its favor and against Idahlie Vazquez (Defendant) as follows:

a. Orders Defendant to pay \$111,402.00 as damages and \$11,000.00 as a civil monetary penalty; plus post judgment interest at the prevailing legal rate; in addition to costs and attorney fees or the 10% surcharge imposed by law if Plaintiff is forced to use the remedies provided under subchapters B or C of the Federal Debt Collection Procedures Act of 1990 (28 U.S.C. § 3011).

b. Grants any other further relief as this Honorable Court deems just and proper.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, this 29th day of September of 2020.

W. STEPHEN MULDROW
United States Attorney

/s/ Jorge L. Matos
Jorge L. Matos
Assistant U.S. Attorney
Civil Division
USDC No. G01307
Torre Chardon, Room 1201
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San Juan, PR 00918
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Attachment 1: Civil Cover Sheet

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS

United States of America

(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff
(EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)
Assistant U.S. Attorney Jorge Matos
Torre Chardon, Suite 1201, 350 Carlos Chardon Ave.
San Juan, PR 00918

DEFENDANTS

Idahlie Vazquez

County of Residence of First Listed Defendant San Juan, PR.
(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF
THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.

Attorneys (If Known)

II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

- ☒ 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff
☐ 2 U.S. Government Defendant
☐ 3 Federal Question
(U.S. Government Not a Party)
☐ 4 Diversity
(Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)

III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES (Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff and One Box for Defendant)

- | | PTF | DEF | | PTF | DEF |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Citizen of This State | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | Incorporated or Principal Place of Business In This State | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| Citizen of Another State | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Incorporated and Principal Place of Business In Another State | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| Citizen or Subject of a Foreign Country | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | Foreign Nation | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 |

IV. NATURE OF SUIT (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

Click here for: Nature of Suit Code Descriptions.

CONTRACT	TORTS	FORFEITURE/PENALTY	BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES
<input type="checkbox"/> 110 Insurance <input type="checkbox"/> 120 Marine <input type="checkbox"/> 130 Miller Act <input type="checkbox"/> 140 Negotiable Instrument <input type="checkbox"/> 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment <input type="checkbox"/> 151 Medicare Act <input type="checkbox"/> 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excludes Veterans) <input type="checkbox"/> 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits <input type="checkbox"/> 160 Stockholders' Suits <input type="checkbox"/> 190 Other Contract <input type="checkbox"/> 195 Contract Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 196 Franchise	PERSONAL INJURY <input type="checkbox"/> 310 Airplane <input type="checkbox"/> 315 Airplane Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 320 Assault, Libel & Slander <input type="checkbox"/> 330 Federal Employers' Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 340 Marine <input type="checkbox"/> 345 Marine Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 350 Motor Vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> 355 Motor Vehicle Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 360 Other Personal Injury <input type="checkbox"/> 362 Personal Injury - Medical Malpractice PERSONAL INJURY <input type="checkbox"/> 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 367 Health Care/Pharmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product Liability PERSONAL PROPERTY <input type="checkbox"/> 370 Other Fraud <input type="checkbox"/> 371 Truth in Lending <input type="checkbox"/> 380 Other Personal <input type="checkbox"/> 385 Property Damage Product Liability	<input type="checkbox"/> 625 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 <input type="checkbox"/> 690 Other LABOR <input type="checkbox"/> 710 Fair Labor Standards Act <input type="checkbox"/> 720 Labor/Management Relations <input type="checkbox"/> 740 Railway Labor Act <input type="checkbox"/> 751 Family and Medical Leave Act <input type="checkbox"/> 790 Other Labor Litigation <input type="checkbox"/> 791 Employee Retirement Income Security Act IMMIGRATION <input type="checkbox"/> 462 Naturalization Application <input type="checkbox"/> 465 Other Immigration Actions	<input type="checkbox"/> 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 <input type="checkbox"/> 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 PROPERTY RIGHTS <input type="checkbox"/> 820 Copyrights <input type="checkbox"/> 830 Patent <input type="checkbox"/> 835 Patent - Abbreviated New Drug Application <input type="checkbox"/> 840 Trademark <input type="checkbox"/> 880 Defend Trade Secrets Act of 2016 SOCIAL SECURITY <input type="checkbox"/> 861 HIA (1395ff) <input type="checkbox"/> 862 Black Lung (923) <input type="checkbox"/> 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) <input type="checkbox"/> 864 SSID Title XVI <input type="checkbox"/> 865 RSI (405(g)) FEDERAL TAX SUITS <input type="checkbox"/> 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) <input type="checkbox"/> 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 375 False Claims Act <input type="checkbox"/> 376 Qui Tam (31 USC 3729(a)) <input type="checkbox"/> 400 State Reapportionment <input type="checkbox"/> 410 Antitrust <input type="checkbox"/> 430 Banks and Banking <input type="checkbox"/> 450 Commerce <input type="checkbox"/> 460 Deportation <input type="checkbox"/> 470 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> 480 Consumer Credit (15 USC 1681 or 1692) <input type="checkbox"/> 485 Telephone Consumer Protection Act <input type="checkbox"/> 490 Cable/Sat TV <input type="checkbox"/> 850 Securities/Commodities/Exchange <input type="checkbox"/> 890 Other Statutory Actions <input type="checkbox"/> 891 Agricultural Acts <input type="checkbox"/> 893 Environmental Matters <input type="checkbox"/> 895 Freedom of Information Act <input type="checkbox"/> 896 Arbitration <input type="checkbox"/> 899 Administrative Procedure Act/Review or Appeal of Agency Decision <input type="checkbox"/> 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes
REAL PROPERTY <input type="checkbox"/> 210 Land Condemnation <input type="checkbox"/> 220 Foreclosure <input type="checkbox"/> 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment <input type="checkbox"/> 240 Torts to Land <input type="checkbox"/> 245 Tort Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 290 All Other Real Property	CIVIL RIGHTS <input type="checkbox"/> 440 Other Civil Rights <input type="checkbox"/> 441 Voting <input type="checkbox"/> 442 Employment <input type="checkbox"/> 443 Housing/Accommodations <input type="checkbox"/> 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment <input type="checkbox"/> 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other <input type="checkbox"/> 448 Education PRISONER PETITIONS Habeas Corpus: <input type="checkbox"/> 463 Alien Detainee <input type="checkbox"/> 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence <input type="checkbox"/> 530 General <input type="checkbox"/> 535 Death Penalty Other: <input type="checkbox"/> 540 Mandamus & Other <input type="checkbox"/> 550 Civil Rights <input type="checkbox"/> 555 Prison Condition <input type="checkbox"/> 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement			

V. ORIGIN (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

- ☒ 1 Original Proceeding
☐ 2 Removed from State Court
☐ 3 Remanded from Appellate Court
☐ 4 Reinstated or Reopened
☐ 5 Transferred from Another District (specify)
☐ 6 Multidistrict Litigation - Transfer
☐ 8 Multidistrict Litigation - Direct File

VI. CAUSE OF ACTION

Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing (Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity):

31 U.S.C. Section 3729(a)(1)

Brief description of cause:

Submission of False Claims Under the FCA

VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:

☐ CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER RULE 23, F.R.Cv.P.DEMAND \$
111402

CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint:

JURY DEMAND: ☐ Yes ☒ No

VIII. RELATED CASE(S) IF ANY

(See instructions):

JUDGE

DOCKET NUMBER

DATE

Sep 29, 2020

SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF RECORD

JORGE MATOS ORTIZ

Digitally signed by JORGE MATOS ORTIZ
Date: 2020.09.29 09:39:27 -0400

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

RECEIPT # _____ AMOUNT _____ APPLYING IFP _____ JUDGE _____ MAG. JUDGE _____

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44**Authority For Civil Cover Sheet**

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

- I.(a) Plaintiffs-Defendants.** Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.
 - (b) County of Residence.** For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)
 - (c) Attorneys.** Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".
- II. Jurisdiction.** The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.Cv.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.
- United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here. United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.
- Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.
- Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; **NOTE: federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.**)
- III. Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties.** This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.
- IV. Nature of Suit.** Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If there are multiple nature of suit codes associated with the case, pick the nature of suit code that is most applicable. Click here for: [Nature of Suit Code Descriptions](#).
- V. Origin.** Place an "X" in one of the seven boxes.
- Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.
- Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441.
- Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing date.
- Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date.
- Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.
- Multidistrict Litigation – Transfer. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407.
- Multidistrict Litigation – Direct File. (8) Check this box when a multidistrict case is filed in the same district as the Master MDL docket.
- PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NOT AN ORIGIN CODE 7.** Origin Code 7 was used for historical records and is no longer relevant due to changes in statute.
- VI. Cause of Action.** Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. **Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity.** Example: U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553 Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service.
- VII. Requested in Complaint.** Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P.
- Demand. In this space enter the actual dollar amount being demanded or indicate other demand, such as a preliminary injunction.
- Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.
- VIII. Related Cases.** This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases, if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

Date and Attorney Signature. Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

Attachment 2: Category Sheet

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

CATEGORY SHEET

You must accompany your complaint with this Category Sheet, and the Civil Cover Sheet (JS-44).

Attorney Name (Last, First, MI): Matos, Jorge L.

USDC-PR Bar Number: 501307

Email Address: Jorge.L.Matos2@usdoj.gov

1. Title (caption) of the Case (provide only the names of the first party on each side):

Plaintiff: United States of America

Defendant: Idahlie Vazquez

2. Indicate the category to which this case belongs:

☒ Ordinary Civil Case

☐ Social Security

☐ Banking

☐ Injunction

3. Indicate the title and number of related cases (if any).

N/A

4. Has a prior action between the same parties and based on the same claim ever been filed before this Court?

☐ Yes

☒ No

5. Is this case required to be heard and determined by a district court of three judges pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2284?

☐ Yes

☒ No

6. Does this case question the constitutionality of a state statute? (See, Fed.R.Civ. P. 24)

☐ Yes

☒ No

Date Submitted: 9/29/20